Merritt Parkway, Frenchtown Road Bridge
Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 31.18 mile mark
Trumbull
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-119

HAER
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1-TRUM,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Frenchtown Road Bridge

HAER No. CT-119

Location:	Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 31.18 mile mark in Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut UTM: 18.649825.4565820 Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut
Construction Date:	January 1942
Engineer:	Connecticut Highway Department
Architect:	George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.
Contractor:	Paul Bacco Construction Company Stamford, Connecticut
Present Owner:	Connecticut Department of Transportation Wethersfield, Connecticut
Present Use:	Used by traffic on Frenchtown Road to cross the Merritt Parkway
Significance:	The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.
Historians:	Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1668, there were only five settlers living beyond the two- mile limit of the Stratford meeting house. Shortly after this date, the land north of Stratford was surveyed, laid out and assigned to individuals. It is unknown if anyone settled there before Abraham Nichols and his family arrived from Stratford in 1690. Other families soon followed, creating a district known as Nichols Farms.[1]

As the population increased, the desire for a local church and government became evident. In 1725, Nichols Farms residents petitioned the General Court for village privileges and a committee was named to view their case. The General Assembly acted in favor of their petition and in October 1725 the Assembly granted the residents of Nichols Farms the "liberty of village privileges," as the Society of Unity. Unity was still a part of Stratford, but could maintain its own meeting house and school, through a local tax.[2]

At the same time, residents from Fairfield were clearing lands west of Unity. This area came to be known as the Long Hill region and faced many of the same problems as Nichols Farms. These settlers were forced to pay for a church and school that were too far away for them to use.[3]

In 1740 the General Assembly granted the Long Hill region an exemption from paying taxes for the school and meeting house in Stratfield, between December and mid March. Furthermore, Long Hill was allowed to develop its own meeting house during these months. Thus, the Winter Society of Long Hill was created; this arrangement continued for four years.

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[1]History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972, (Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972), 25.

[2]History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 26.

[3]David A. Cronin, "History of Trumbull, Connecticut," Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration, (Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935), 5.

In 1744, the parishes of Unity and Long Hill, only five miles apart, were consolidated into the Society of North Stratford. The new society functioned in virtually the same manor as the Unity parish. As they were now allowed to manage their own religious and educational affairs, residents became anxious to obtain complete independence from Stratford. For more than fifty years North Stratford sought to become an individual township. In October 1797, the General Assembly passed the "Trumbull Bill" establishing the Society of North Stratford as the town of Trumbull.[4]

The Boston Post Road and the main line of the railroad both passed to the south of Trumbull, isolating the community as a rural farming region until the completion of the Merritt Parkway in 1940. Trumbull was the location the Connecticut Highway Department's main field office during the construction of the Merritt Parkway.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Frenchtown Road commences at Old Town Road and proceeds north one block to Williams Road. The Frenchtown Road Bridge was not originally planned as part of the Merritt Parkway. The highway department designed and built the bridge after local residents requested it.

The D. V. Frione Construction Company, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Main Street/Route 25 to the Huntington Turnpike, in Trumbull (ConnDot project #180-02). While the Frenchtown Road Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Paul Bacco Construction Company of Stamford, CT (ConnDot project #180-179).[5] The bridge cost $55,912 and was under construction from June 9, 1941, to January 5, 1942. The paving

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[4]History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 28.

[5]Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

work for this region of the Merritt also extended from the Black Rock Turnpike to Main Street/Route 25. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-102). The Frenchtown Road Bridge has had portions of its concrete facade removed and replaced, certain sections are still loose from salt damage.[6]

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Frenchtown Road Bridge is a double-span, reinforced-concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge. Each frame spans 49'-6" over two lanes of the Merritt Parkway. Parallel wing walls, 26'-6" long, form the approach for the underpass. The bridge provides a 30' clear roadway at a 6 percent grade for Frenchtown Road.

The rigid-frame design for this bridge differs from most of the other bridges on the Merritt Parkway because it is shaped like a segmental arch, instead of an arched beam, supported on short walls. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The twin frames meet at the center abutment wall. The walls, which are the frame legs, are about 4' tall above the roadway. The walls flare at the bottom. The arches rise 12'-0" above the springline. The frame thickness increases from 1'-6" at the crown to over 3'-8-1/2" at the wall. The spandrels of the arch are filled with gravel and bounded by reinforced-concrete walls at the faces. The minimum clearance provided is 14'-3".

The Frenchtown Road Bridge displays one of the most extensive uses of cast stone on the Merritt Parkway. The smooth ashlar-masonry appearance comes from large sheets of 4"-thick, brown cast stone. The voussoirs of the arch are sized to match the shape of the arch of the rigid frame. The cast stone is

[6]Frenchtown Road Bridge, DOT #749; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

used as the formwork for the structural concrete. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed discussion of cast stone.) The bridge railing, the copings, and the niche in the larger pylons are cast-stone trim pieces.

The cast stone is used to effect a fortified bridge in the French Renaissance style. The solid look of the ashlar masonry is complemented by the massive parapet with several small square openings just over the middle of the span. The center pier has triangular shaped pylons, like those at river crossings, that are used to divert water and debris from damaging the pier.

The effects of wind, temperature, and moisture can not be diverted by these means. At present, the facade of the bridge is deteriorating. The cast stone has fallen off in large chunks at several locations, and efflorescence is seeping through many of the cast stone joints.

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Cronin, David A. "History of Trumbull, Connecticut." Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration. Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935.

-------. History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972. Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972.

-------. Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

-------. Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.